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14. ABSTRACT Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) represent a contemporary, whole-of-government approach to national issues by aligning authorities and capabilities of disparate agencies under one operational commander with a focused mission, and by promoting interagency cooperation through a unique, inclusive organizational structure. JIATF-South, in particular, has been highly successful at detecting, monitoring, and interdicting transnational threats comprising the illegal drug trade and the narco-terrorists perpetuating the movement of drugs and drug conveyances to U.S. shores during its 26-year history. JIATF-South's success at combating the transnational drug threat offers a compelling model for U.S. government efforts to counter Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), which constitutes a growing threat to international stability and governance and poses an especially daunting national security challenge to the United States in the 21st century. This study serves to analyze the effectiveness of the JIATF-South organizational structure as well as propose that a similar operational-level coordinating mechanism aligned under a Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) is both necessary and optimally suited to combat the myriad of asymmetric threats the U.S. faces from transnational crime, which at present range from drug trafficking and cybercrime to human trafficking and narcoterrorism.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Joint Interagency Task Forces; the right model to combat Transnational Organized  
Crime?**

**by**

**James M. McLay  
LCDR, U.S. Coast Guard**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily  
endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: //s//James M. McLay**

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## **Paper Abstract**

### *Joint Interagency Task Forces; the right model to combat Transnational Organized Crime?*

Joint Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) represent a contemporary, whole-of-government approach to national issues by aligning authorities and capabilities of disparate agencies under one operational commander with a focused mission, and by promoting interagency cooperation through a unique, inclusive organizational structure. JIATF-South, in particular, has been highly successful at detecting, monitoring, and interdicting transnational threats comprising the illegal drug trade and the narco-terrorists perpetuating the movement of drugs and drug conveyances to U.S. shores during its 26-year history. JIATF-South's success at combating the transnational drug threat offers a compelling model for U.S. government efforts to counter Transnational Organized Crime (TOC), which constitutes a growing threat to international stability and governance and poses an especially daunting national security challenge to the United States in the 21st century. This study serves to analyze the effectiveness of the JIATF-South organizational structure as well as propose that a similar operational-level coordinating mechanism aligned under a Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) is both necessary and optimally suited to combat the myriad of asymmetric threats the U.S. faces from transnational crime, which at present range from drug trafficking and cybercrime to human trafficking and narcoterrorism.

*“Our organizational construct is our strength. It fosters collaboration through unity of effort/vision. We are the model for future command and control of forces arrayed against asymmetric threats to regional stability and homeland defense.*

*- JIATF-South Overview Brief*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) represents both a relatively recent and growing threat to U.S. national security. Broadly defined, Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) refers to groups that perpetuate illegal, transnational crime for power, influence, or commercial gain via the use of corruption, violence, and an organizational structure which exploits international commerce and communication channels.<sup>1</sup> TOC networks take advantage of seams between national laws, political structures, enforcement capabilities, and varying degrees of stability and legitimacy to infiltrate government and establish legitimate and illegitimate businesses, with the primary goal of economic gain.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing the significant and detrimental impact, the United States conducted a comprehensive assessment of the TOC threat in 2010. The output of this study resulted in the first ever "Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime."<sup>3</sup> As an overarching policy document, the National Security Council (NSC) effectively created strategic-level objectives and priority actions. It even designated an Interagency Policy Committee to oversee implementation, but the approach did not include a viable operational-level coordinating mechanism.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, actions conducted at the tactical level remain haphazard and disconnected from policy-level objectives.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time bureaucracy has stymied the effective coordination of a national-level response requiring a whole-of-government (WOG) approach. From health crises to natural disasters, recent history is replete with U.S. government (USG) responses

plagued by dysfunctional command organizations that lead to bureaucratic infighting, territorial disputes, redundant authorities, and vague operational-level objectives.<sup>5</sup> In each case the lack of unity of effort was the apparent cause of failure. A striking exception to this has been the Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF), and in particular, the remarkable success enjoyed by JIATF-South. By many accounts, JIATF-South has become the standard for interagency cooperation, successfully fusing the capabilities of disparate intelligence, military, and law enforcement agencies to effectively combat narco-terrorist organizations. Both the nature of the adaptive transnational crime threat and the unparalleled success of JIATF-South suggest that a similar command organization is both necessary and optimally suited to combat the myriad of asymmetric threats the U.S. faces from transnational crime.

#### **BACKGROUND: BENEFITS OF THE JIATF**

Any study espousing the benefits of JIATFs in enhancing interagency coordination and effort towards addressing transnational crime must first be preceded by an analysis of the history, organizational construct, and critical elements which have enabled JIATF successes. Although other JIATFs exist, this study will focus on JIATF-South, a military-led organizational entity under the umbrella of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM). Although JIATF-West (U.S. Pacific Command or PACOM) shares a counterdrug charter and similar organizational history, it lacks the tactical focus of JIATF-South because efforts focus largely on partner nation law enforcement and intelligence capacity-building.<sup>6</sup> Other JIATFs or Joint Task Forces (JTF) formed to address an array of criminal and national security issues are also not an apt comparison because they possess either nominal interagency participation or lack a significant law enforcement nexus.

JIATF-South is worth studying mainly due to its staggering successes. In fiscal year 2014, JIATF-South assets seized or disrupted more than 158 metric tons of cocaine, representing nearly 76% of cocaine destined for the U.S.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, it successfully disrupted countless illicit air and sea trade routes, improved information sharing amongst dozens of source-nation countries, seized cartel funding through counter threat finance targeting, and established a robust intelligence network capable of predicting drug movements with incredible accuracy.<sup>8</sup>

JIATF-South started life as one of three Department of Defense (DOD) Joint Task Forces established in the 1980s to provide operational-level coordination to a disparate group of military, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies fighting President Reagan's declared "war on drugs." National impetus for creating such organizations was two-fold. First, there was a realization that the growing drug threat and the cartel's violent criminal activities constituted a legitimate national security threat requiring military intervention. Second, there was a collective recognition that the threat had grown beyond the capacities of the responsible federal agencies to respond in a coordinated and efficient manner. Congress reacted by designating the DOD as lead federal agency for the detection and monitoring of drug shipments destined for the U.S. In this role, the DOD quickly realized that without the coordination and unity of effort of law enforcement, "they were merely conducting detection and monitoring without closing the cycle of interdiction and arrest."<sup>9</sup>

Led by a Coast Guard rear admiral, JIATF-South boasts representation from all five armed services, the National Guard and reserve, more than 13 agencies from the Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and Intelligence Communities, as well as 18 liaison officers representing 15 different countries.<sup>10</sup> An integrated command structure includes a Navy

deputy director, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) vice director and a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) deputy J2 (intelligence).<sup>11</sup> U.S. Naval War College professor Milan Vego suggests successful organizational performance "can be achieved either through unity of command or through cooperation."<sup>12</sup> The blended organizational construct of JIATF-South produces unity of effort partially through unity of command, but mainly through true integration and agency cooperation.

In JIATF-South, members have legitimate decision making authority unfettered by the need for agency reach-back for approval, evaluations are conducted in-house, and intelligence on drug movements and activities is widely disseminated amongst interagency and selected international liaison officers.<sup>13</sup> Even more telling is the willingness of participating agencies to overcome a reluctance to share intelligence, including highly sensitive information gleaned from human sources. The preponderance of JIATF-South interdictions and disruptions are now intelligence-cued, suggesting JIATF-South has been able to overcome parochial roadblocks to intelligence sharing common to other multi-agency efforts.<sup>14</sup> Lastly, although JIATF-South was created by legislation, interagency participation is largely voluntary and codified by little more than a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).<sup>15</sup> In this regard, it has sometimes been referred to as the "coalition of the willing" because agencies are largely free to come and go as they please.<sup>16</sup> Participation in the task force has grown because most agencies and international partners, regardless of interdictor (USCG, CBP, USN) or investigator (FBI, CIA, DEA) roles, realize the synergistic benefits of participation far outweigh what could be accomplished alone. Tellingly, agencies are willing to pay operating costs for both assets (boat, planes, equipment) and personnel and some



international partners have cited the success of the task force as the basis for increased funding.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, JIATF-South has not only produced unity of effort, but effectively overcome barriers to collaboration and redundancy common to government efforts while successfully exploiting capabilities, expertise, and authorities across a broad array of agencies and coalition partners.<sup>18</sup> Most importantly, JIATF-South provides an operational-level link from Washington D.C.'s counterdrug policy directives to tactical efforts of disparate agencies in the primary source zone of cocaine movement.<sup>19</sup> While this organizational layer may not be necessary for military forces, agencies such as the FBI, CBP, and DEA lack true theater-level interagency coordination and fusing mechanisms; therefore, actions at the tactical level by agencies with overlapping mission areas are rarely coordinated and often redundant. Finally, as the United States moves into what the Congressional Budget Office predicts will be a decade of federal debt and deficit growth, JIATF-South represents a cost-effective alternative to growing the government.<sup>20</sup> The temporary nature of the JIATF and the practice of sourcing billets from existing service/agency allocations deflect claims of government over-reach and bureaucratic layering.

Some have argued that JIATF-South's success is attributed to an organizational structure directed by a U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) flag officer.<sup>21</sup> This argument has some merit, as the USCG possess a unique blend of national defense (title 10) and law enforcement (title 14) authorities and expertise. Coast Guard officers are especially well-versed in the distinct language and culture of both the interagency and armed forces and can seamlessly transition from the DOD's hierarchical JTF construct to the interagency's flatter, competency-based Incident Command System (ICS). These qualities make them the natural choice to infuse

harmony in a task force containing elements of both models. However, while the selection of a USCG flag officer is ideal and likely a contributing factor in JIATF-South's high performance, this argument discounts positive factors such as the narrowly focused mission, information sharing, intelligence fusion, and budgetary construct. In their comprehensive analysis of JIATF-South, Evan Musing and Christopher Lamb highlighted 10 performance variables of cross-functional teams which enabled success, none of which were contingent upon a particularly strong or personable leader. In their opinion, JIATF-South's success was less a reflection of the director and more a product of the presence of a myriad of other performance factors.<sup>22</sup>

#### **TOC THREATS—THE ENVIRONMENT AND APPLYING THE JIATF CONCEPT**

The impact of transnational crime upon the international system, as a whole, has been devastating. As criminal activity permeates across borders, it cripples partner nations, undermines the rule of law, and destabilizes entire societies and public institutions. TOC growth poses a particularly acute challenge to the Western Hemisphere. U.S., South and Central America, and Caribbean nations now battle increasingly well-resourced and extremely violent TCO networks trafficking drugs, weapons, people, and contraband while employing tactics such as murder, kidnapping, extortion, and money laundering with impunity.<sup>23</sup> According to JIATF-South, TOC networks are "capable of generating hundreds of billions of dollars in illicit revenue--money that has the power to challenge nations through crime and terror."<sup>24</sup> In an increasingly globalized and interconnected world, the alarming evolution and adaptation of these groups has defied law enforcement efforts to either slow the growth or prevent an expansion of trafficking activities across the U.S. border. Alluding to the growing diversification of TCO activities as well as the pernicious threat of TOC to

U.S. citizen safety and regional stability, President Obama issued an executive order in 2011 declaring a national emergency.<sup>25</sup>

At present, the USG's efforts to combat TOC are not conducive to what the Commander of SOUTHCOM, Gen. John F. Kelly, suggests is the requisite "integrated counternetwork approach."<sup>26</sup> In fact, as of 2015, the White House had yet to offer any implementation guidance or designate a lead federal agency or organization to lead the counter transnational organized crime (CTOC) effort.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, such a disconnect below the strategic level is a consistent criticism of multi-agency efforts. A 2011 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report analyzing U.S. government agencies effectiveness at carrying out complex national security initiatives observed:

Agencies face a number of challenges to effectively collaborate with one another, potentially resulting in gaps and overlaps in policy implementation. In particular, we have found that agencies face challenges to developing overarching strategies to achieve common goals, creating effective mechanisms for operating across agencies, and sharing implementation.<sup>28</sup>

Although theoretically the National Security Council (NSC) integrates all the elements of national power-- or DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic)--towards national objectives, assimilation below the NSC remains a barrier to a comprehensive, effective, and efficient approach.<sup>29</sup> Various forums have been created to fuse civilian and military planning efforts at the strategic and theater-strategic levels, including Interagency Policy Committees (IPC) and the Joint Interagency Coordination Groups (JIACG).<sup>30</sup> Promote Cooperation is another coordination strategy meant to bridge U.S. government efforts towards requirements as defined in the Joint Security Capabilities Plan (JSCP).<sup>31</sup> However, as the impotence and inaction of the IPC for the Strategy to Combat TOC suggests, these forums are largely symbolic without the operational level coordinating mechanisms to make them efficacious.

As certain threats are sufficiently prioritized and national effort is galvanized, instead of developing such mechanisms, the USG most often defaults to civilian-led task-centric organizations. The Department of Justice's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Joint Terrorism Task Force, and the Department of Homeland Security's Southern Border Joint Task Force are all examples of interagency organizations developed to harness resources and more effectively coordinate efforts towards combating some form of transnational crime. While each addresses an element of TOC, all three lack either the authority to allocate resources or the information sharing framework needed to make them effective at degrading a complex TOC enterprise.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, an operational-level JIATF has the potential to successfully bridge the gap between policy development and implementation in part due to the numerous parallels that exist between elements of the counter-drug/counter narco-terrorism (CD/CNT) mission and 21<sup>st</sup> century TOC such as human trafficking, cyber-crime, and narco-terrorism. Like the CD/CNT threat, most TCO networks originate and are prevalent in failing or failed states. Also, like the growing narco-terror nexus, TOC also blurs the lines between national defense, homeland security, and law enforcement. Response relies upon multiple agencies expertise, capabilities, and authorities. Also, there remains in most cases both a law enforcement and prosecutorial component to close the cycle that extends from detection to prosecution. Furthermore, the CTOC response would benefit immensely from a greater investment of assets, capabilities, resources and expertise that the DOD offers. Finally, missing from CTOC response is the coordinating mechanism at the theater strategic and operational-tactical levels necessary to induce a truly WOG response.

A military-led JIATF is especially well-postured to lead the interagency fight against TOC. The DOD's fiscal year 2015 (FY15) budget is more than five times greater than the collective funding of four other departments with equities in the TOC mission: Departments of State (DOS), Homeland Security (DHS), Justice (DOJ), and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).<sup>33</sup> The DOD's strong surveillance, cyber, and intelligence capabilities which have proven so successful in the detection and monitoring (D&M) portion of the CD/CNT mission can act as an equally robust force-multiplier in combating human smuggling and trafficking. In general, DOD has the capabilities or resources that other agencies lack. Furthermore, the existing GCC structure provides the nucleus for JIATF implementation because the geopolitical lines, authorities and relationships necessary to conduct Security Force Assistance (SFA) and Foreign Internal Defense (FID) are already codified.<sup>34</sup> What is more, Congress has recognized the growing TOC threat and recently expanded authorities of the National Defense Authorization Act allowing military forces the capability to combat transnational crime similar to CD/CNT and in accordance with theater campaign plans.<sup>35</sup>

In SOUTHCOM, JIATF-South fills the void as a viable operational/major tactical coordinating mechanism for the GCC to combat TOC. The unity achieved by this organization creates a rapid, flexible, and adaptable means of harnessing vested interagency interests while overcoming challenges of sovereignty, resource disparity, opposing languages, diverging cultures, and lack of authorities common to other government efforts.<sup>36</sup> To this end, JIATF-South capabilities have not only degraded drug networks, but expanded successfully to counter money laundering and threat financing of traffickers as well as illicit arms shipments to North Korea in their 42-million mile Joint Operational Area (JOA).<sup>37</sup> In

fact, JIATF-South's recent update to their mission statement reflects a movement beyond the legacy mission of detecting and monitoring drug shipments to an active role supporting partner agency efforts to "disrupt and dismantle" TCO networks responsible for crime and violence in the region and who pose a threat to U.S. National Security.<sup>38</sup> The organization's successful adaptation has not gone unnoticed. In the article, "JIATF-South: Blueprint for Success," the author argues that JIATFs stand to most effectively serve "as a model for bringing the most effective assets to bear on complex national policy issues, whether it be illegal drugs, weapons proliferation, or international terrorism."<sup>39</sup>

American University Professors Gordon Adams and Shoon Murray are among a chorus of voices arguing the militarization of foreign policy and growing mission-creep of the DOD into non-defense missions has vast political and institutional implications, including a weakened DOS role undermining the bedrock democratic principle of civilian leadership and primacy over national issues.<sup>40</sup> Along these lines, various proposals reinstituting civilian control have been put forth. Indeed, the expansion, reorganization, or creation of additional military-led JIATFs to address TOC risks upsetting the balance of power even further.

This argument is not relevant for the CTOC mission for several reasons. First, DOD has equities and on occasion requirements to combat transnational crime. This is especially true of the SFA/FID missions of the GCC in an growing crime-terror convergence environment. Second, and as evidenced by DOD responses to what has traditionally been considered "civilian" missions such as the Haiti earthquake, the Southeast Asian tsunami, the West African Ebola crisis, and the postwar re-construction of Iraq, the DOD was involved because it had the resources and budget other agencies lack.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, inherent to the military are the planning culture, mission-focus, and theater-centric organizational structure lacking

throughout the interagency. Finally, as proven not only by JIATF-South but by the successful Civilian Operation and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) pacification program in Vietnam, a properly integrated, military-led JIATF command organization provides interagency leadership control and access of resources they otherwise lack.<sup>42</sup> In effect, JIATFs are capable of increasing civilian influence while also achieving unity of command.

## **PROOF OF CONCEPT**

Numerous parallels can be drawn between the disjointed USG efforts in the counterdrug mission 30 years ago and several emerging TOC threats and the associated USG responses of today. The convergence of criminal and terror activity and the ability of JIATF-South to successfully adapt to drug trafficking organizations' (DTO) expansion of activities in SOUTHCOM's area of responsibility suggest a JIATF is likely the USG's best hope for an adequate, WOG response, to a broad array of global TOC. The following discussion will center on three elements of transnational crime where the adoption of a JIATF command organization would likely prove efficacious.

### Human Trafficking

Trafficking in Persons (TIP) represents one of the fastest growing areas of transnational crime.<sup>43</sup> USG efforts to address these criminal acts date back as early as 2000 when the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) was passed into law. Among other things, the TVPA created the President's Interagency Task Force to Monitor and Combat Trafficking (PITF) as well as its self-declared operational arm the Senior Policy Operating Group (SPOG).<sup>44</sup> The PITF is a cabinet-level coordination group chaired by the Secretary of State and comprised of 14 departments and agencies with equities in the mission.<sup>45</sup> Similar to the

IPC created in the Strategy to Combat TOC, the SPOG was designed to oversee the implementation of strategic-level objectives as set forth by the PITF and meets quarterly to discuss initiatives and set priorities/goals.

Like the 1980s drug war, a renewed focus on battling human trafficking has largely been driven through the executive branch. The years that followed President Obama's 2012 call for strengthening federal efforts to battle TIP witnessed the creation of strategic action plans, white house forums, and public awareness campaigns.<sup>46</sup> Among other accomplishments, the SPOG boasts of a renewed focus on TIP by investigatory and law enforcement agencies at all levels, the creation of regional strategic plans, and in general, greater federal oversight and involvement in local TIP-centric task forces.<sup>47</sup>

As with many federal efforts, missing is a regional mechanism to fuse and share intelligence, direct and coordinate enforcement actions, and direct prosecutorial efforts at the tactical levels. Furthermore, the failure to designate a lead federal agency or mandate significant involvement from the military means the 14 agencies with equities in the TIP mission are left in a strikingly similar situation to that of law enforcement agencies fighting the drug war nearly 30 years ago. SOUTHCOM and PACOM, while supporters of human rights, embrace a comparatively passive posture on TIP-focused training and awareness of its personnel, remaining much more concerned with the corridors that traffickers could potentially exploit to smuggle weapons of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>48</sup> A more prominent military role through a TIP-focused JIATF leverages DOD's broad detection, monitoring, and intelligence capabilities and coordinates actions within targeted geographic boundaries. A JIATF would also utilize existing authorities while remaining in alignment with theater



campaign plans and guiding principles currently outlined in DOD's strategic plan for combating TIP.<sup>49</sup>

### Cybercrime

Cybercrime, or "the use of a computer as an instrument to further illegal ends," is on the rise.<sup>50</sup> According to the NSC, this transnational criminal activity costs consumers billions of dollars while destabilizing critical networks which threatens the worldwide financial, energy, transportation, and communications systems.<sup>51</sup> Gen. Alexander, the former Chief of the National Security Agency (NSA), estimates Cybercrime costs U.S. companies \$250 billion each year and more than \$1 trillion is spent globally in efforts to combat and protect against cyber espionage and cybercrime.<sup>52</sup>

There are a host of task forces set up to deal with domestic cybercrime issues, including the FBI's National Investigative Joint Task Force and the Secret Service's regional Electronic Crimes Task Forces.<sup>53</sup> DOD and DHS efforts to protect military and civilian networks, guided by the National Cyber Incident Response Plan, many times overlap, especially where crimes against "critical" networks, infrastructure, and intellectual property are concerned.<sup>54</sup> It is in this emerging, ubiquitous domain, where criminal and security threats converge and roles and responsibilities are unclear that the greatest threat to national security exists and the potential for criminals to exploit seams created by jurisdictional lines on a map remains high. Gen. Alexander echoed these sentiments, saying "What we need to worry about is when [cyber attacks] transition from disruptive to destructive attacks...we have to be ready for that."<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, movement towards a joint approach is already underway. In February 2015, the DOD announced the establishment of a Director of National Intelligence (DNI)-led Cyber

Threat Intelligence Integration Center (CTIIC). The purpose of this organization is to “coordinate a quick and unified response from government experts” and harness “all the available tools and draw on the full range of government resources to disrupt threats.”<sup>56</sup> The creation of this group was driven in part by the disjointed USG response to the Sony Pictures hack of 2014 along with the acknowledgment that agency ownership for producing and sharing cyber threat assessments remained unclear.<sup>57</sup> The efficacy of the CTIIC remains to be seen; however, by retaining a small footprint and without the designation of a lead federal agency, the CTIIC is unlikely to have the manpower, resources, or span of control to induce a truly WOG response to a national cyber threat.<sup>58</sup> A JIATF, by contrast, would appropriately harness the full weight of U.S. Cyber Command, sequence and synchronize offensive and deterrence actions within a defined theater of operations, and provide both defense in depth and unity of command/effort amongst the more than a dozen government agencies with cyber-related equities.

#### Crime-Terror Nexus and Convergence

The convergence of criminal and national security threats is not limited to cybercrime. The NSC suggests the most significant DTOs impacting the U.S. have ties to terrorism, and groups such as Al-Qaida, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), al-Shabaab, and Hizballah are now using criminal activities such as the drug trade, kidnapping, and extortion to finance terrorist activities.<sup>59</sup> During testimony to Congress, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper assessed the practice of terrorist and insurgency groups turning increasingly to crime to fund operations and the “threatening crime-terror-nexus” a top five national security concern.<sup>60</sup> As crime and terror converge, especially in non-permissive

environments, the primacy of the military's role and the suitability of a military-led JIATF in what is increasingly a national defense issue becomes more readily apparent.<sup>61</sup>

Nowhere is a military solution more applicable than in Mexico and Central America, where violent terrorist tactics employed by TCOs have drawn comparisons to an insurgency.<sup>62</sup> In order to overcome an actual decades-long insurgency and thwart ongoing narco-terror activity, Colombia has been the beneficiary of U.S. military aid, training, equipment, and information sharing made possible through programs such as the Colombian Strategic Development Initiative.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, through Operation MARTILLO, an ongoing multi-nation, counterdrug operation in Central America, JIATF-South cultivates impressive international linkages which have improved access and partner nation coordination where convergence activity is most prevalent and threatening to U.S. interests.<sup>64</sup> JIATF-South's impressive track record of disrupting multi-billion dollar revenue streams fueling the violence and inducing the convergence complement SOUTHCOM's ongoing military partner nation support activities in this region.

In essence, SOUTHCOM and JIATF-South are already addressing a convergence which compelled Congress nearly a decade ago to afford the President broad discretion in using counterdrug funding to combat terrorist organizations.<sup>65</sup> They are perhaps on the leading edge of recognizing that there remains little distinction at the operational level between what is required to defeat the converging threats. JIATF-South also remains one of the few proven solutions to harness WOG resources towards defeating both threats simultaneously and, at present, remains the only USG entity resourced and structured to defeat a converging TOC-terror threat with mil-to-mil, mil-to-LE, and mil-to-international partnerships already in place at the tactical and operational levels.<sup>66</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of JIATF-South has spurred a number of ideas and recommendations in an attempt to replicate the organization's success while applying the concept towards other national issues. James Carafano of the Heritage Foundation suggested deconstructing the GCC structure to create, in its place, military-led JIATFs aligned regionally according to the threat. For example, a JIATF-South focused on terrorism, human trafficking, drug smuggling; a JIATF Africa/Middle East focused on terrorism, arms smuggling, infectious diseases; and, a JIATF South/Central Asia focused on terrorism, piracy, infectious disease, WMD development.<sup>67</sup> In the article, "Death of a Combatant Command," the authors suggest the formation of civilian-led Joint Interagency Commands (JIACOMs) with subordinate JIATFs to integrate operational and tactical-level activities and lead local crisis management.<sup>68</sup> U.S. Special Operations Command (US-SOCOM) took the JIATF concept one step further by studying and emulating JIATF-South successes to form highly successful "interagency high-value targeting teams in Iraq and Afghanistan" which produced a "dramatic improvement in special operations performance."<sup>69</sup>

The global nature of transnational organized crime and the adaptive nature of TOC networks suggest the formation of JIATFs along regional boundary lines risks the creation of "seams" between areas of responsibility (AOR) that TCOs might readily exploit to their advantage. A JIATF-Western Hemisphere (WH) designed to address all TOC threats to the U.S., while remedying this issue, would require considerable bi-partisan legislation to restructure the military's operational chain of command at the theater-strategic level. Along these lines, the authors of a Joint Forces Staff College thesis analyzing TCO threats proposed

combining SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM to form an AMERICOM with a subordinate JIATF Americas in order to align disparate CTOC strategies and promote unity of effort.<sup>70</sup>

While these ideas have merit and the concern over potential seams is legitimate, the U.S. government's ideal approach to countering transnational crime is regionally-based, TOC-focused JIATFs aligned under existing Geographic Combatant Commands. TOC threats remain too diverse and regionally-specific to expect one organization such as a JIATF-WH/Americas to effectively manage global TOC threats ranging from human trafficking and cybercrime to threat financing. To do so risks losing, among other things, the cultivation and sustainment of local intelligence-based sources and domain awareness which have been so readily apparent in JIATF-South's success.

This approach in effect widens the aperture of JIATFs West and South to formally encompass any and all TOC activity inherent to their AOR, and transitions JTF-North to a JIATF with substantive interagency participation. This model achieves economy of effort, reduces redundancy across mission areas, and retains the regional focus necessary to address and prioritize TOC threats unique to their region. Retaining the military leadership is imperative. As evidenced by both SOUTHCOM's laudable CTOC efforts as well as the ineptitude of a host of domestic joint task forces to degrade TOC, the GCC remains the only organization currently postured and funded to combat the full cycle of TOC from detection to prosecution by aggregating authorities and capabilities across the interagency and leveraging international partnerships already in place. Expanding JIATF charters for the CTOC mission would also be consistent with the 2012 Guidance for the Employment of the Force (GEF) which emphasizes campaign planning to "identify appropriate CTOC support activities" and "emphasize economy of force and low cost, small footprint activities."<sup>71</sup>

Implementation of this concept will not necessarily be easy. One benefit is that building out the JIATFs capability to address the spectrum of TOC threats will not require executive or legislative approval, which is a more realistic scenario in a stagnant, divisive political environment. The convergence between DTOs and terror groups enables JIATF-South to perform legislatively-authorized duties consistent with the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan, which mandates the “detection, monitoring, and interdiction support for illicit trafficking *and* other narco terrorist threats within the prescribed JOA.”<sup>72</sup> As previously mentioned, JIATF-South has by necessity already started to widen its focus to TCO networks at the root of drug trafficking and other transnational criminal activities. A more daunting challenge, as noted by Gen. Kelly, is an austere budget environment and JIATFs reliance upon force allocation from services and agencies which may not have the assets (USCG), prioritization (USN), or money (interagency) to devote to the CTOC mission.<sup>73</sup> Such capacity constraints by JIATFs must be overcome, as they did in the late 1990s in the counterdrug mission, through a better focus on human, electronic and signals intelligence which maximized available resources while changing the paradigm from “cold hits” to primarily intelligence-cued interdictions.<sup>74</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

There is broad consensus that responding to 21<sup>st</sup> century transnational crime requires the application of all elements of national power. Yet while the USG's policy framework for countering transnational crime has largely been established at the strategic level, a void remains at the theater-strategic, operational, and tactical levels. This prevents a coordinated, WOG approach to combating transnational organized crime and has provided TOC networks a time-space advantage as well the ability to adapt its force faster than the USG's ability to

respond. As JIATF-South has demonstrated, a properly integrated, resourced, and geographically-focused interagency task force whose actions complement the partner nation activities of the GCC has the potential to significantly degrade the transnational crime threat. As the stakes are raised in a converging narco-terror-crime threat environment, TOC-focused JIATFs modeled after JIATF-South and aligned under the GCC offers the most capable, cost-effective, and palatable option for the U.S. government to combat the insidious threat posed by transnational criminal organizations.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Fact Sheet: Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime; Available from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/07/25/fact-sheet-strategy-combat-transnational-organized-crime>; Internet; Accessed March 20, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald A. Boston, "The United States Military's Role in Combating Transnational Organized Crime" (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army War College, March 2013), 21.

<sup>5</sup> Disjointed Federal responses in the wake of Hurricane Katrina (2005), the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Coast oil spill (2010), the Southwest U.S. border immigration crisis (2014), and the West African Ebola crisis (2014) are the most recent examples.

<sup>6</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher Lamb, "Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success"; Strategic Perspectives No. 5 (June 2011), 79.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Southern Command, Posture Statement of Gen. John F. Kelly, USMC, Before the 114th Congress Senate Armed Forces Committee; March 12, 2015, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Aggregated from U.S. Southern Command's "Component Successes" (JIATF-South) from 2013, 2014, 2015 Posture Statements to Congress.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Remsing, "'Seams' of Inefficiency and Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) Operations;" (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Naval War College, May 2003), 5.

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<sup>13</sup> Kevin Lopez, CAPT, USCG liaison to JIATF South, interview by the author, Newport, RI, March 27, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Robert S. Pope, "Interagency Task Forces: The Right Tools for the Job." Strategic Studies Quarterly, (Summer 2011): 117.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 120. Premise was confirmed via conversation with USCG liaison officer to JIATF-South.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Lopez, CAPT, USCG liaison to JIATF-South, interview by the author, Newport, RI, March 27, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> As an example, the July 11, 2011 GAO report, Interagency Collaboration: Implications of a Common Alignment of World Regions among Select Federal Agencies, noted challenges posed by diverging planning schedules amongst three federal agencies (USAID, DOS, DOD).

<sup>19</sup> USG counterdrug policy directives are issued by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and encapsulated in the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan (NICCP).

<sup>20</sup> Congressional Budget Office, An Update to Budget and Economic Outlook: 2014 to 2024; August 27, 2014; Available from <https://www.cbo.gov/publication/45653>; Internet; Accessed April 2015.

<sup>21</sup> In recounting JIATF-South's history, CAPT Kevin Lopez, USCG liaison to JIATF-South, asserted that during the organization's early years it became evident that participating agencies did not respond well to a Department of Defense (DOD, U.S. Navy) director, hence the permanent change to a Coast Guard rear admiral.

<sup>22</sup> Evan Musing and Christopher Lamb, "Joint Interagency Task Force-South: The Best Known, Least Understood Interagency Success"; Strategic Perspectives No. 5 (June 2011), 76.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Southern Command, Countering Transnational Organized Crime. Available from <http://www.southcom.mil/ourmissions/Pages/Countering%20Transnational%20Organized%20Crime.aspx>; Internet: Accessed May 2015.

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- <sup>30</sup> U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Interorganizational Coordination During Joint Operations. (Joint Pub 3-08) (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2011).
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Thomas F. Atkin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense (PDASD-HD), interview by the author, Newport, RI, April 16, 2015. Mr. Atkin's assertion was that gaps in authorities prevent these task forces from being as effective as perhaps they are capable of being. The author extended this premise of ineffectiveness to encompass the CTOC mission.
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- <sup>35</sup> U.S. Southern Command, Posture Statement of Gen. John F. Kelly, USMC, Before the 114th Congress Senate Armed Forces Committee; 12 March 2015, 13.
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- <sup>39</sup> Richard Yeatman, "JIATF-South: Blueprint for Success." JFQ Forum No. 42, (3rd quarter 2006), 26.
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- <sup>42</sup> Robert B. Oakley and Michael Casey Jr., "The Country Team: Restructuring America's First Line of Engagement." Joint Force Quarterly, No. 47, (4th quarter 2007): 148.
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